

Writing the ordinary:

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC TALES OF AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

**Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology, Sydney
May, 2009**

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Abstract

This thesis is an auto-ethnographic study of my life as an occupational therapist. Auto-ethnographic writing animates the culture of occupational therapy by fictionalising moments of practice in one woman's life that can contribute to the collective biography of the profession in Australia. The purpose of this auto-ethnography is to re-inscribe the everyday world of practice into public accounts, at a time when occupational therapy as a profession is becoming a scholarly discipline.

Every profession has rich oral and practice traditions that are located in the everyday. Occupational therapists have a 'double dose' because the work we do explicitly concerns the everyday activities of others. Participation in all the ordinary things that people need and want to do every day is part of the 'immense remainder' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 61) of human experience that 'does not speak' (Hasselkus, 2006). This auto-ethnographic inquiry into my professional life restores something of the intimacy, viscosity and particularity of practice, which, I argue, has been left behind in the search for scholarly and professional legitimacy for occupational therapy.

The thesis consists of a portfolio of fictive tales together with layers of historical and theoretical framing. The tales are in direct dialogue with a selection of articles from my own published work concerned with the practices of a youth-specific occupational therapy project undertaken in the 1980s. A critical commentary connects the new writing with the old, related to the problematic of everyday life and to constructions of professionalism in the bigger picture of occupational therapy.

This portfolio of tales of sexuality, food and death dramatises 'paradigmatic scenes' from a remembered world of occupational therapy, recalling moments of practice with young people living and dying at Camperdown Children's Hospital. These fictional tales are twice-told, first, by an Anglo-Australian occupational therapist in her 30s and then by girls of Pacific Islands, Aboriginal and Turkish heritage. The particular approach of crafting twice-told tales in dialogue with selected publications is what makes this auto-ethnographic project distinctive. These fictive engagements with practice may 'recover' subjugated knowledges from lost and repressed places. Such 'writing the ordinary' may have ethical implications for (re)presenting interactions between all the actors involved in moments of practice.

Author's declaration

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Solun Mngun", is written over a horizontal line.

Publications during candidature

Denshire, S. (2007). Stooping Down in Complete Occupation of the Footpath, Occupational Terminology, *Journal of Occupational Science*, 14,1, 52-53.

Denshire, S. (2006). Towards an auto-ethnography of an occupational therapist's published body of work, Conference paper in Proceedings of the ACSPRI 2006 Social Science Methodology Conference, New Ethnographies and Critical Creativity Stream, The University of Sydney, 10-13 December, 2006, pp. 1-21.

Denshire, S. (2006). In praise of auto-ethnography. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* 53 (4), 346-347.

Conference presentations and submissions during candidature

Denshire, S. & Choi, J. Adventures in autoethnographic research: Doctoral students writing self and writing other. Paper submitted to the ACSPRI 2008 Social Science Methodology Conference, New Ethnographies and Critical Creativity Stream.

Denshire, S. 'Within/against' occupational therapy: A conceptual frame and method for writing an auto-ethnographic account of practice. Paper at *open-ing research space-s: Post graduate Student Research Conference*, UTS City Campus, Sydney, 30-31 May, 2008.

Denshire, S. Fictionalising practice: A workshop on expanding ways of writing occupational therapy that draws on doctoral research. Abstract submitted to OT AUSTRALIA 23rd National Conference & Exhibition, September, 2008.

Denshire, S. 'Into the picture': Working with the visual to expand ways of telling practice. Poster at RIPPLE Seminar, Wagga Wagga, 7-8 Feb, 2008.

Denshire, S. Crafting A Portfolio Of Fictional Tales In Dialogue With My Selected Publications On Occupational Therapy With Young People: An Auto-Ethnographic Design. Paper at 6th International Conference on Imagination and Education, Canberra Rydges Lakeside 29-31 January, 2008.

Denshire, S., Poster at postgraduate day, *11th Annual Australian Association of Writing Programs*, Perilous Adventures: Creative writing and research in the higher degree and beyond. Creative Industries Precinct, Queensland University of Technology, 23-26 November, 2006, Brisbane.

Denshire, S., What does(n't) the dictionary say? Playing with poetic representation. Poster at *14th Congress of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists*, OTs in Action: Local and Global, 23-28 July, 2006, Sydney.

Acknowledgements

First, Professor Alison Lee for extraordinary and unrelenting doctoral supervision in multiple locations, her good humour and for gradually allowing the text to come into being. Associate Professor Colleen Mullavey-O'Byrne for an in depth reading of the history chapter and guidance on the doctoral assessment panel early on. I also appreciated input of Professor David Boud on the panel. Janet Bell and Barbara Anderson for their considered advice on the history of occupational therapy. Professor Bruce Pennay for his historical perspective during chance meetings at the airport and on the train.

Dr Jennifer Jones for our Writing Group, her consistent feed back as the work took shape and valuable suggestions on writing cultures. Thanks also to Marie Macklin and Helen Van Huet for visiting. Jane Downing for sharing the journey and writerly encouragement. People at UTS were always welcoming; Teena Clerke for design, doctoral students Kate Bower, Juria (Julie) Choi, Ishbel Murray and Lorraine West. Sam Sayin for advice on writing Turkish cultures. Cynthia Nelson and Cate Poynton for writing workshops, Susanna Gorman for ethics advice. My talented occupational therapy colleagues in Dalrye, Tracey Parnell and Professor Gail Whiteford. CSU colleagues in Community Health, Education, Humanities & Social Sciences and Business. Colleagues at the Imagination and Education Conference 2008, and in the New Ethnographies and Critical Creativity Stream at the ACSPRI Social Science Methodology Conference 2006, in particular Dr Debbie Horsfall and Debbie Long.

Dr Rosy Black, Dr Michael Curtin and Leslie Milne, Therese Schmid, Pam Milliken for ongoing support and interest. Nancy Robinson for core stability classes, Albury Swim Centre, The Masonic Club and Country Link. My colleagues and young people from Camperdown days. Mum, Jayne and Dr Elise, Dr Jo Zubrzycki, Dr Judith Peppard, Amanda Stavert, Sheri Sommerley, Nina Kyte, Chris Singleton, Bill Bottomley, Maxene Morgansson and Pru Gollege. Last and most important, my partner Alan and our grown up children Tim and Holly, for their practical support and endurance throughout the writing process.

Thank you to the University of Technology, Sydney for the award of an RL Werner Doctoral Scholarship.

Dedication

To the grandmothers of occupational therapy in Australia